

# NEW JERSEY ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (NJ ASK) Grades 6, 7, and 8

## EXPLANATORY WRITING: SAMPLE PROMPTS AND GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS

February 26, 2009



# Introduction

- In keeping with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) for language arts literacy and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2011 writing framework, the department seeks to assess student writing skills through a broad range of writing challenges;
- Toward that end, the department is developing additional types of writing tasks to supplement the familiar writing prompts.
- This PowerPoint is intended to provide additional information about these NJ ASK writing tasks.




## Introduction continued:

- On the 2009 assessment, explanatory writing tasks will replace the speculative writing prompt on assessments in grades six through eight.
- An explanatory writing task will provide an essay task based on a quotation or adage, or based on a topic accessible to all students. Each is a springboard for the student to write an essay that informs the reader.
- In responding to the topic or quotation presented, students will be asked to explain their point of view and to create an original work. Explanatory writing may be based on the writer's personal knowledge and experience, or on information presented to the writer. Explanatory writing is used to share knowledge and to convey ideas.



## Introduction continued:

- In 2010 and beyond, the department will continue to use a variety of tasks – persuasive, narrative, and/or expository prompts – to assess student writing achievement. All tasks will be rooted in the NJCCCS for writing (Standard 3.2) and the 2011 NAEP writing framework.
- The following slides provide examples of explanatory writing prompts and guidance in understanding how they will be scored.
- Students will also be responding to a persuasive writing task. Information about speculative and persuasive writing tasks is available in *Criterion-Based Holistic Scoring: A Writing Handbook*, previously disseminated to districts.



# What should students know about explanatory writing prompts?

- An explanatory writing task will provide an essay task based on a quotation or adage, or based on a familiar topic. Each is a springboard for the student to write an essay.
- In responding to the quotation or essay topic presented, students will be asked to explain their point of view and to create an original work. Explanatory writing may be based on the writer's personal knowledge and experience or on information presented to the writer.



# Guidelines

- Students are given 25 minutes to construct an expository piece of writing based on the given writing prompt or on some aspect of that prompt.
- Each student is given two blank planning pages and four lined-pages. Only the lined-pages are scored.
- Students may use as many of the lined-pages as needed to respond to the prompt.



## Guidelines continued:

- During testing, the NJ ASK Writer's Checklist is provided to encourage students to read, reread, revise, and edit their written work.
- For the purposes of scoring, all students' writing is considered a first draft. During testing, students are neither permitted to confer with others nor to refer to outside resources such as a dictionary, thesaurus, or classroom displays.
- The student's written response will be scored using the NJ Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric for grades six through eight.



# Samples

- The samples on the following slides illustrate the possible task formats of explanatory prompts.
- Exemplary responses may be viewed at the web-link provided after Sample # 9.
- Use these samples in conjunction with the NJ Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric, the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standard 3.2, and instructional best practices.





# Sample #1

(Grade 6)

People enjoy playing games. Some take games they know and change the rules while others invent their own board games, ball games, or other games.

Write an essay about a new game you created or might like to create, or an old game for which you changed the rules. Be sure to explain your game by using details and examples to support your explanation.



# Sample #2

(Grade 6)

You are submitting an essay to the annual essay competition at your school. You have been asked to consider how the following quotation is related to you.

“You make the world a better place by making yourself a better person.”

- Scott Sorrell

Write an essay explaining what this quotation means to you. Use details and examples in your essay.



# Sample #3

(Grade 6)

Life can be full of pleasant surprises. Identify a time when you experienced a pleasant surprise.

Write an essay about a time when you experienced a pleasant surprise. Explain why this surprise was unexpected and how it affected your life in a positive way. Be sure to explain your choice by using details and examples.



# Sample # 4

(Grade 7)

Many students enjoy doing something special for their family and friends. For example, they may take care of their younger sibling or help to cook a favorite meal.

Write an essay that describes something special that you would like to do for your family or friends. Explain why this would be something special and how your family or friends might react. Be sure to include details and facts to support your explanation.



# Sample #5

(Grade 7)

You have been asked to consider how the following quotation is related to you.

“Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions.  
All life is an experiment.”

-- *Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882)*

Write an essay explaining what this quotation means to you. Use details and examples in your essay.



# Sample # 6

(Grade 7)

You have been asked to consider how the following quotation is related to you.

“It is not enough to have a good mind. The main thing is to use it well.”

--René Descartes (1596 – 1650)

Write an essay explaining what this quotation means to you. Use details and examples in your essay.



# Sample #7

(Grade 8)

Some students like to plan every activity that they do each day. Some prefer to go through the day with as little planning as possible. Think of a day in your life that was especially enjoyable. Was it a day that you had carefully planned or one that was unplanned?

Write an essay about a day that you enjoyed which was either planned or unplanned. Be sure to use details, examples and reasons in your explanation.



# Sample #8

(Grade 8)

As part of a language arts class assignment, you have been asked to consider the following quotation:

The function of education is to teach one to think critically.  
Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.  
— *Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968)*

Write an essay in which you explain whether you agree or disagree with this quotation. You may use one or more examples from your experiences. Be sure to use details, reasons, and examples in your explanation.





# Sample #9

(Grade 8)

As part of a language arts class assignment, you have been asked to consider how the following quotation is related to you.

“If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn’t lead anywhere.”

--Anonymous

Write an essay explaining what this quotation means to you. Use details and examples in your essay.



# Annotated Exemplars of Student Responses

Can be viewed by copying and pasting the following URL into your web browser or click on the link below:

<https://www.measinc.com/njask/Files/LAL%20Grade%208%20Writing%20web.pdf>



# NJ Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric

The NJ Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric for grades 6 through 8 can be found on page 43 of the following web-link:

[http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/ms/samples2007/final\\_NJASK\\_07\\_Sampler20Key\\_Rubric\\_Exemplars.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/ms/samples2007/final_NJASK_07_Sampler20Key_Rubric_Exemplars.pdf)



## Additional Websites

- **NJCCCS**

<http://www.nj.gov/education/cccs/>

- **Writing Framework for the 2011 NAEP**

<http://www.nagb.org/frameworks/2011naep-writing-framework.doc>

- **NJDOE Office of State Assessments**

<http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/>

# Resources

## The Criterion-Based Holistic Scoring: A Writing Handbook (Speculative and persuasive writing prompts with annotated exemplars)

- E-copies of the writing handbooks can be found via the following URLs:

### Grade 5

- <https://www.measinc.com/njask/Files/Criterion-Based%20Holistic%20Scoring%20-%20A%20Writing%20Handbook%20Grade%205.pdf>

### Grade 6

- <https://www.measinc.com/njask/Files/Criterion-Based%20Holistic%20Scoring%20-%20A%20Writing%20Handbook%20Grade%206.pdf>

### Grades 7 & 8

- <https://www.measinc.com/njask/Files/Criterion-Based%20Holistic%20Scoring%20-%20A%20Writing%20Handbook%20Grades%207%20&%208.pdf>



# Contacts

Sharon Dama, Language Arts Literacy Coordinator  
[sharon.dama@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:sharon.dama@doe.state.nj.us)  
609.633.6917

JoAnne Tubman, NJ ASK 6- 8 Program Coordinator  
[joanne.tubman@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:joanne.tubman@doe.state.nj.us)  
609.777.2087

Timothy Peters, Director  
Office of State Assessments  
[timothy.peters@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:timothy.peters@doe.state.nj.us)  
609.984.7761

Mary Jane Kurabinski, Director  
Office of Language Arts Literacy Education  
[mary-jane.kurabinski@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:mary-jane.kurabinski@doe.state.nj.us)  
609. 633.1726